20 July 2005
Biodiversity Mapping Group
RI Environmental Monitoring Collaborative
URI Coastal Institute

Meeting Minutes

Present: P. August (URI), Cheryl Hapke (USGS), Jon Boothroyd (URI), Sandra Whitehouse (RI House), Don Pryor (Brown U), Helen Cottrell (NBEP), Rick Enser (DEM), Paul Ricard (DEM), Chuck LaBash (URI), David Gregg (RINHS), Deb Pelton (NEIWPCC), Julie Lundrgren (TNC), Carol Murphy (DEM), Frank Golet (URI), Chris Raithel (DEM), Kathleen Wainwright (TNC).

Each attendee reviewed their monitoring activities relevant to biodiversity and habitat that they are involved in or interested in pursuing. Some of the comments that were offered include the following:

- Plants and habitats are a much more amendable target for monitoring biodiversity. Animals are too cryptic and hard to reliably observe.
- Multi-scale monitoring is essential and must include site-specific observation as well as landscape-scale assessment of habitat abundance and configuration.
- The Heritage Program dataset of species of concern contains approximately 3,000 records of 300 species of plants and 200 species animals. 50%-75% of the Heritage species are associated with wetland habitats.
- We should consider using volunteers to assist in species/habitat monitoring.
- Habitat monitoring needs to include habitats that are presently common and not threatened.

The group felt the following observations are critical when considering monitoring biodiversity.

- The RIEMC should continue to take a leadership role in bringing together the various groups involved in monitoring biodiversity.
- Synthesis, assessment, and communication of biodiversity and habitat monitoring is an essential component and the RIEMC should continue to take a leadership role in developing a plan to achieve this.
- There are important constituencies for monitoring ecosystem conditions and trends in places throughout the state, including in urban and other degraded or otherwise less than ideal habitats not of interest to those concerned with the status of heritage species or overall species diversity.
- Biodiversity monitoring data should be made available on the Internet as fast as possible (with acknowledgement of the need for confidentiality in cases where highly vulnerable species are concerned).
- Retain focus on the need to ensure that good science and reliable data are the basis for biodiversity monitoring.
- Remap wetlands in RI at a scale and level of accuracy that will support using these new data as a basis for biodiversity monitoring.

- Encourage new, innovative thinking on monitoring biodiversity. Continue to advocate for an RIEMC grants programs to support developing novel approaches to monitoring.
- Continually evaluate monitoring activities to ensure they are providing the necessary data for the resource managers and decision-makers. Adjust as needed. Live adaptive management!
- Pursue development of new approaches to measure ecosystem fitness that use existing or easily acquired data.
- Reinforce need to design monitoring programs to support resource management.
- Must monitor habitats and biodiversity at scales that accommodate information needs of municipalities, state, and the Bay watershed. Different monitoring protocols will likely have to be used at different scales.

These findings will be reported to the RIEMC with the request that the biodiversity team be asked to continue these deliberations.